

14 Vital Skills for Supervisors

Resolving Coworker Conflicts



5



Resolving Coworker Conflicts

Pick your battles and focus on shared goals to referee disputes effectively.

Conflict Resolution

Skill 5

- Conflicts are reality. They happen
- It's not necessarily your job to intervene in conflicts
- May be best to adopt a hands-off policy – keep your distance; let people resolve their own issues



Dangers of Intervening

- If you rush to referee every conflict, you may wind up breeding more conflicts
- Employees may figure that they can get your attention this way 🔊
- Your quick interventive teaches employees that they need not take responsibility for getting along



When to Intervene


Skill
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- Does the conflict threaten the ability of employees to perform their jobs?
- Are the combatants prone to violence?
- Does the conflict involve serious allegations? 🔊
- If you answered “yes” to any of the above, then you need to resolve the dispute



Defusing Conflict

Skill
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- Requires skill and diplomacy
- Interests usually clash
- Goal is to reach a positive outcome so that employees learn to get along 
- But many employees want you to play judge and jury – to study the cause and assign blame; they are more intent on defending themselves



Guidelines to Resolve Conflicts Effectively

Skill
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- Hear both sides – together
 - Call a meeting and require both employees to attend
 - Tell them in advance 📢 that you'll ask them to summarize the conflict, their role in it and their suggestions for resolving it
 - Begin the meeting by establishing ground rules: no interrupting, bickering or other outbursts

Privacy concerns
may necessitate
a private
meeting



Guidelines to Resolve Conflicts Effectively (continued)

Skill
5

- Control the conversation
 - Make sure the employees talk to you at all times, not each other
 - If they violate that rule, interrupt immediately so that they don't start arguing 🔊



Guidelines to Resolve Conflicts Effectively (continued)

Skill
5

- Position yourself as mediator
 - Direct employees' eye contact to you, not each other
 - By having them sit at a 45 degree angle to your right and left – with you in the center – you lower the odds they'll lapse into a screaming match
 - Keep the area between each of you clear; don't use a table



Guidelines to Resolve Conflicts Effectively (continued)

Skill
5

- Listen without reacting
 - Maintain a dispassionate, focused expression while employees talk to you
 - Keep your opinions to yourself
 - Resist the urge to nod sympathetically, shake your head in dismay or otherwise indicate that you agree or disagree with what you hear
 - Employees will scrutinize your response to determine who you believe or support in the conflict



Guidelines to Resolve Conflicts Effectively (continued)

Skill
5

- Tap the power of silence
 - Resolving employee disputes often means knowing when to keep quiet
 - If you ask a question and do not get a prompt answer, wait for a reply
 - Don't rush to fill the silence by asking another question or changing the subject



Guidelines to Resolve Conflicts Effectively (continued)

Skill
5

- Withhold your suggestions
 - An idea might pop into your head as you listen to employees characterize their side of the dispute 🔔
 - Wait to come to the rescue with your proposed solution
 - Individuals who are angry or hurt often need time to blow off steam



Warning

Skill 5

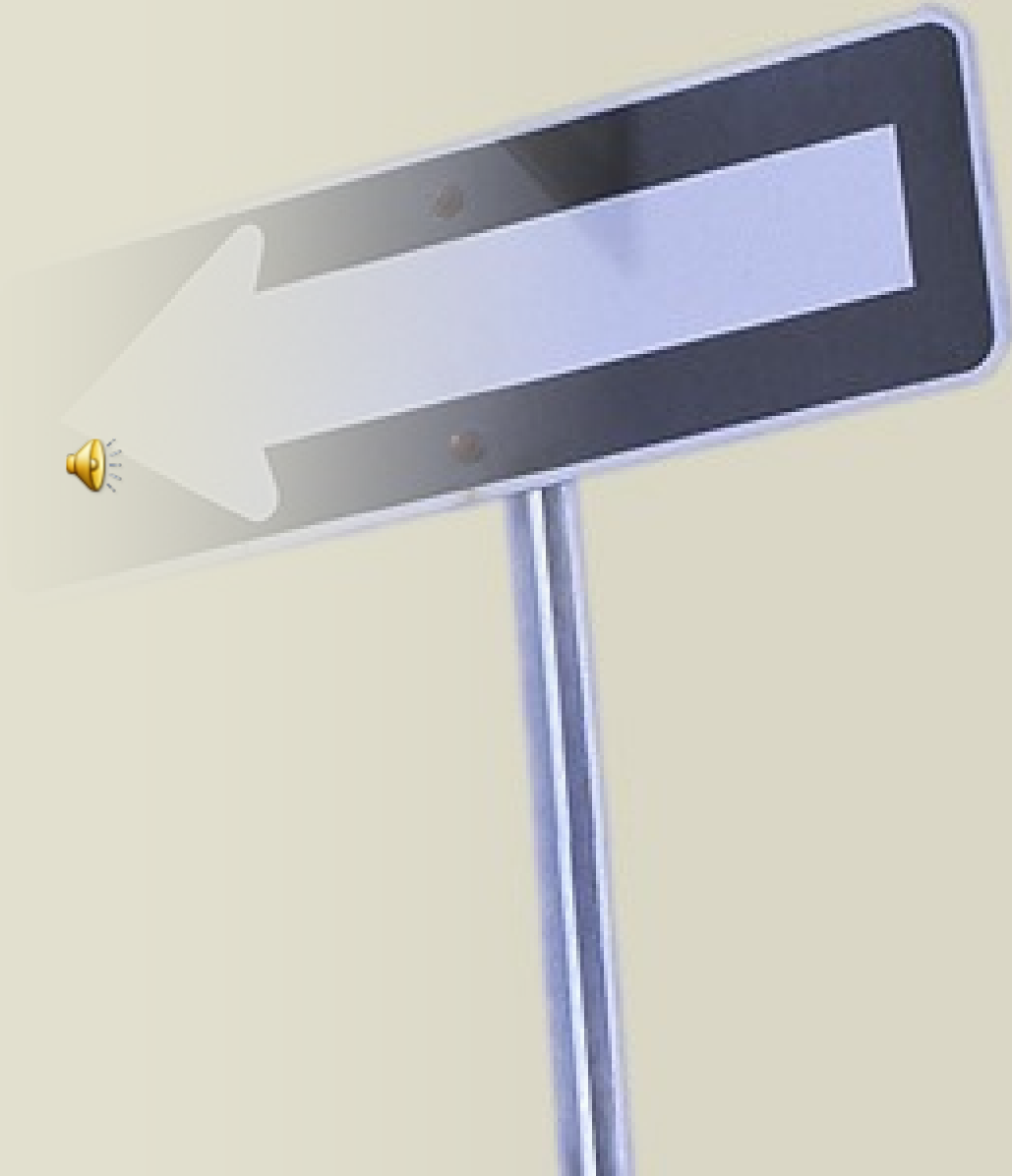
- If tempers flare, radiate calm
- Don't mirror the rising tension in the room
- If employees see that you're joining the fray, they will unleash even more venom to make themselves heard 📢



Tip

Skill 5

- Draft a “contract” that codifies all the steps both employees promise to take to resolve the conflict
- Write clearly and specifically so that everyone knows what’s expected
- Invite both employees to edit your first draft



Tip (continued)

Skill
5

- Give copies of the final contract to both participants so they can hold themselves—and each other—accountable
- Have them sign the contract and shake hands as a peace-making gesture, and then hold employees responsible for implementing the plan



It's True

Skill 5

- The faster you establish common ground, the sooner you'll resolve the conflict
- Look for openings to ask, "So you can both agree that...?" 🔊
- If that's impossible, identify shared interests
- Let employees see that their destinies are "intertwined"

